

3-D Lenormand Square Spread

A 36-Card Alternative to the Grand Tableau

Intuitive Tier	Card # 1	Card # 2	Card # 3
Emotional Tier	Card # 10	Card # 11	Card # 12
Mental Tier	Card # 19	Card # 20	Card # 21
Physical Tier	Card # 28	Card # 29	Card # 30
	Card # 4	Card # 5	Card # 6
	Card # 13	Card # 14	Card # 15
	Card # 22	Card # 23	Card # 24
	Card # 31	Card # 32	Card # 33
	Card # 7	Card # 8	Card # 9
	Card # 16	Card # 17	Card # 18
	Card # 25	Card # 26	Card # 27
	Card # 34	Card # 35	Card # 36

When working with Lenormand spreads smaller than the Grand Tableau, one way to focus the reading on a particular aspect of the client's life (for example, romance, work, money, health, family, school, travel) is to mentally “charge” a single card to represent the target area (which means nothing more than selecting it in advance as the “topic” card). One quarrel I have with this approach is that - much like an old-style tarot “significator” - the chosen card is sometimes removed from the deck prior to the shuffle and placed in a specified location in the layout, often the central position in an odd-numbered spread. This removes some of the uncertainty from the process but also saps its spontaneity, restraining that card from highlighting secondary aspects of the matter as it frequently does in the Grand Tableau. On the other hand, the alternative method of leaving the topic card in the deck often assures that it will not appear in the spread at all.

There is a more creative way to handle this apparent limitation, although it is a complex and difficult concept that isn't for the faint of heart or easily confused. Small spreads such as those of 3, 4, 6 and 9 cards have position totals that divide evenly into 36, making it possible to deal out the entire deck into uniform stacks that can then be read both as two-dimensional “layers” and as three-dimensional “columns,” enhancing the detail and depth of the narrative. This ensures that the topic card will always show up in the spread, and also allows it more flexibility within the broader environment of the reading. The stack containing the topic card can be considered the “linchpin” or critical link between the different levels of the layout, meriting special attention. The individual “planes” of the spread can be read in the same way as a single-tier arrangement, with the added twist that the cards in each layer represent only one facet of a contingent scenario that may flow obliquely to the main story-line. For example, if the bottom line in a 9-card square is customarily seen as the “future” and the bottom-right card represents the “outcome,” the four-card stack in that position could be read as a continuum arising in the underlying circumstances, passing through the “present” and pressing onward into further developments. The appearance of the topic card in that stack would be strong testimony to the importance of the additional detail to the client's future state of affairs, perhaps hidden or otherwise ambiguous detail.

The 9-card square (and also the 9-card line) provides the most practical opportunity for use of this innovation because the four-card stacks it yields are simpler to read as a “side-story” than longer series when built up from the four “2-D” layers of the spread. However, with a minor paradigm shift this technique can be made to work with 5-card and 7-card lines by adding the last card dealt to the center position, giving it more “weight:” 7-7-8-7-7; 5-5-5-6-5-5-5. The extra card could be read as a summary, overview or outside perspective offering more general advice to the client.

The “distance method” of interpretation, which assigns greater importance and often greater benefit to the majority of the cards the closer they are to the topic card, doesn't fare well in the standard 9-card square since no card can be any more distant than “near” to any other card in the hierarchy of “close-near-intermediate-far,” where “close” means “touching”. Expanding the square into a “cube” creates, at the very least, a case of “intermediate” distance from the top or bottom card of a four-card column when read vertically, and any card that is set off from the head or foot of the column in any direction qualifies as “far” from the starting point. Some of the more negative cards like the Clouds are improved by being farther away from the topic card, where their adverse effect is mitigated. Since all of the cards are “in play” it becomes worthwhile to import some of the considerations that apply when reading the Grand Tableau. Concepts like intersection, knighting and mirroring take on new meaning when cast in three-dimensional terms. They also become more difficult to discern, especially when trying to identify “off-axis” alignments, and can rapidly deteriorate into a case of diminishing returns,

Where it really gets interesting (and a bit weird) is in the practice of knighting. Apart from the center card, which makes no “knighting” contacts, the peripheral cards in the common “flat” 9-card square can form a total of 8 unique knighting arrays in each of the four tiers, for a total of 32. Adding a vertical dimension creates dozens of additional knighting opportunities (including several for each of the four center cards) that join the four tiers of the layout. For example, Card #1 at the bottom of the upper-left column normally knights to Cards #6 and 8, but vertically it can also knight to Cards #12, 16, 20 and 22, while Card #10 in the second tier of that column can knight to Cards #15, 17, 21, 25, 29 and 31. In this way, the physical tier can contact the mental and emotional tiers, but the intuitive tier is technically beyond its reach, which neatly symbolizes one of the psychological hazards of modern cultural conditioning. (Vertical “mirroring” is beyond the scope of this guidance, and has its own unique difficulties.) It would be best to limit this knighting technique to the location of the topic card, which can have at most six contacts, four of them across tiers.

The four 3X3 layers of a 36-card “cube” can be treated as four-fold phases of a variety of metaphysical hierarchies, working from the “outside-in” (that is, from the topmost layer to the bottom tier): physical/mental/emotional/intuitive; action/thought/feeling/instinct; completion/initiation/preparation/intention; concrete/emergent/formative/abstract; apparent/assumed/hinted at/concealed; certain/probable/possible/implausible; a fanciful botanical model might be fruit/branches/trunk/roots; in psychological terms (arguably not the best use for Lenormand), it could suggest levels of conscious, subconscious, unconscious and superconscious awareness attending specific aspects of the situation. My personal preference is to view it as the emergence of understanding from a chaotic state of uncertainty through increasingly confident episodes of lucidity to the final crystallization of insight, the “Aha!” moment when everything becomes clear. I read each layer according to its hierarchical significance first, then the pivotal column containing the topic card, and finally any other columns that stand out as being particularly relevant to the question, as shown by the combination of adjacent cards both horizontally and vertically.